

STEPS IN DEVELOPMENT

By Nell Truesdell

In our progress toward estimating ourselves to be pure spiritual Being, we pass through numerous phases and many degrees of knowledge. In the natural order of development, before we are able to comprehend and accept even a degree of our spiritual reality, we awake to a realization of ourselves as physical-mental entities. In this dual state we give attention to both aspects of our existence and we live, we could say, balanced between the two.

When we turn to the physical, we are conscious of the corporeal nature: its need for food, clothing, and shelter, and its demand for ample support to provide these needs.

When we turn to the mental, we are conscious of the intellectual phase, and again we are aware of need. We observe our lack of sufficient knowledge, regardless of how much we already possess, that would better enable us to complete with others in our bid for a higher social and economic standing.

To satisfy the physical wants we turn toward the world and try to find the place where we can work successfully for our living in order to receive adequate compensation to keep us supplied with the things needed for physical comfort. A comfortable living is one of our inner drives and causes us to exercise ourselves in such a way as to earn enough money to pay for all the necessities and as many of the luxuries of life as possible.

To satisfy our mental needs, we turn to the schools - our systems of education - and we study subjects that seem to fit in with our present chosen standard of living and our scheme for the future. If we had not gained sufficient education or vocational training while we were young, after maturity, we continue our studies in order to reach the standard we have set for ourselves. We believe that adequate education along a given line will help us provide better for ourselves and so live at a more satisfactory level than we should without the added training.

As we turn from attending one phase of our life to the other, trying to keep our balance between the two so that we might hold our place in the crowd around us (every member of which copes with the same problems), we seem to be floating on the stream of life with each foot set upon a distinct area. Often our foothold appears to be unsteady under our weight as we try to keep in mid-stream where the two phases flow more closely together. Panic frequently seizes us for we realize that if ever we lose our hold on one area we shall be separated from both, for, to be divested of either the mental or the physical equipment means a total black-out.

In rare quiet moments when we can think about our predicament, we sometimes sigh for salvation, or something, to lift us out of it all; we long for solid ground upon which to stand so that we might go whither we would without fear of losing all we had. During maturity, we have a little less ardor for the struggle for existence and more and more we long seriously for some way out. These moments of pensive reflection are all too brief for the business of coping with the present consumes our attention and our energies. When such moments occur, however, something close at hand miraculously appears ready to offer assistance. Sometimes a few words overheard on the street, attending a

lecture, or picking up some book or paper at random, brings us our first sudden realization that there is something to know that lies beyond what is already known. Perhaps the curtain is lifted ever so little but an unforgettable impression is made. A very old saying goes something like this: When the student is ready, the teacher appears.

In this day, if a person is ready and is inclined to listen, he is apt to be introduced to some phase of metaphysics since that study is more and more becoming the open door to a new and practical understanding of life and living. A person catching a glimpse of the light that lies beyond the veil of his own mental darkness, is fired by that very light, for it strikes direct the smoldering coal lying deep within himself. Truth heard or read clashes against the truth enwrapped in the soul and a new tone vibrates throughout the whole consciousness, stirring the called-out one to wakefulness. The newly awakened are usually amenable to instruction and are willing to study the steps that must be taken, alone and voluntarily, that lead to the field of Spirit; for, no human being can coerce another into a study and practice of the things of God. "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." "When he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth."

If the new student is really serious, he takes first steps first, just as he would in learning any subject in the schools. He begins with the most simple instructions, practices them until he understands and makes progress as fast as is possible to him. No one can grow more rapidly than he is able. Too, it is fortunate that no one can aspire too high, for nothing is impossible of achievement in truth; it knows and is all things.

Because the average person has learned to think in order to solve problems, his first contact with metaphysics is apt to be with that branch that encourages an extended use of his imagination. He learns about visualizing the good he desires to have manifest in his body and in his affairs, and in the lives of relatives and friends, and, to his amazement the practice gets results. It does not occur to him that for the first time in his life, perhaps, he is definitely thinking good thoughts and imagining good things to get good results. Countless students are entranced with the astonishing demonstrations they make through forming mental images of things not yet manifested. These mental pictures are so fascinating that frequently the attention of the mind is trapped in over-practice and soon the student stultifies himself. His silly reasoning and conduct might lead him eventually to become untrustworthy and dishonorable. It is a trait in human nature for one person to want to take dominion over others and make them serve questionable purposes to advance self-interest. The visualizer usually fixes his attention on getting more things, or to use others to get them for him. He seldom wishes to change his personal, willful point of view after a sense of power has been aroused; he puts off the day of perfecting his own consciousness until after he has made everybody else over to his liking and after he has demonstrated all the things he himself wants.

Visualizing is no foreign practice to anybody. Daily the imagination plays among the lights and shadows of intellectual knowledge, the feelings, and the material possessions, accenting and increasing at a given moment whatever is gripped by it. The undiscerning make little effort to transfer the play of mental images from a lower to a higher standard if the interest is engaged to the point of absorption. Thought forms are curiously intriguing - they hold the attention captive and bend it to fulfill or demonstrate outwardly what is imagined.

Who would choose to subject himself to the imagination of someone else, even though that one might be revered and trusted? Who can know what is good for another?

Because we realize how important it is for each individual to stand alone with his God, we accent again and again the instruction that we can never fit another to our pattern of perfection for him. We never try to visualize anything for another as we think it ought to be according to our iron-bound idea, for at our weakest point an over-sight will eventually be revealed. After our structure has been raised, it crashes to earth a mass of ruins taking with it him for whom we planned so well. Why? Because we are not infallible.

If the practice of visualization is exercised consciously, it should be for ourselves alone. Let us be the guinea pigs of our own mental experiments and almost at once over-exercise of the practice will be curbed or will stop altogether, for it will not be long before we shall be suffering the consequences of our fallibility. The safest practice of visualization is to stay the imagination on God, and the result will be good because we can never affect or sway the Almighty no matter what we imagine. However, through giving attention to him, we are affected for our good by his Divine influence.

A little higher practice in metaphysics (and we say higher because the person himself undergoes a transformation which filters throughout his entire consciousness to change it for the better), is that of denial and affirmation. The student learns to deny, wholly, all thought-forms of evil, sickness, misery, lack, and death. As he practices, he comes to realize that negative thoughts and appearances are not the reality about anything or anybody, including himself. In this practice he is apt to make an effort to cleanse his own mind of accumulated thought-forms that might be turned blank, or empty, or without a particle of strength. By refusing assent he withholds the substance that had hitherto supported them through his thought and they soon pass out of his mind because, to him, they become nonexistent.

In the September 1944 issue of our paper we cited four denials to parallel the first of Jesus' experiences as he emerged from an old state of consciousness and made himself ready for his dynamic ministry. We repeat them here:

1. The past offers no life to sustain me.
2. There is no nourishment in materiality.
3. There is no gratification in desire.
4. There is no attainment in personal ambition.

Denial is not a shifting of one set of thoughts to displace another. It is a complete turning away from things that appear so that the attention might be given over to things eternal.

Affirmation is an easier practice than denial to the majority of people. Many like to memorize promises of Scripture so they are available any time of the day or night. Some like to take the instructions of Jesus in such a way that they consciously keep his word. All affirmation is a strengthening practice and it is well to realize that the words used should accent things spiritual - the eternal verities - so that one escapes falling into a habit of announcing what is simply an elemental expression one's own will. Let the affirmation exalt God, and there need be no fear of what is said. Such words will bear good fruit.

If the student has his heart set on growing in grace and understanding of God, he will be led quickly through the foregoing exercises to the place where he realizes that he need not think at all; that he might simply gaze toward the Eternal above thinking and above being and come to know things never perceived by others engaged in pure mental practice. He is introduced to the simplest of practices: that of looking toward his Maker. And, as the attention of his mind is absorbed, he realizes that looking God-ward is but one more external step toward the Most High.

For the "looking" is not the ultimate. It is only a practice to be achieved by all who hunger and thirst after the Divine. Few ever come far enough to know the practice. Little instruction can be given regarding it because it is a silent, wordless realization within the soul that cannot be transmitted from one to another in language. Gazing toward the Lord God Almighty in such a manner as to lose the sense of discrimination between oneself and God is the truest uplook. After it is achieved no words can avail to tell the act of Knowing, for, it transcends all intellectual concept and learning. It is the Unknown come to dwell with him who is true to Itself in such a way that he is lost to himself and found unto It.

It is the foreseeing provision of the loving Father that man can express himself freely as to what he thinks about God and the Good. As he talks about God, his very words become spirited, animated, vital. With the influx of Spirit (through just such superficial attention to spirit, or God), comes a sense of power. Since the consciousness is not yet wholly purified, this power surges within and finds outlet through the weakest point in a man's make-up. Like steam in a kettle, it pours through the spout, and, if that opening is not sufficient, it rattles the lid in spasmodic puffs of increased pressure.

If a man's weakness is quick anger accompanied by profanity, with the increase of spiritual power as a result of even his fleeting attention toward God, comes an easier arousing accompanied with a ready mis-use of language. This is a good sign if it is recognized for what it is: the opportunity to take direct control by diverting the increased power into the higher selected channel of up look, instead of "running of at the mouth" to give vent to disturbed emotions.

The practice is not easy at first, but the awakened man takes right hold on himself and begins at once to exercise his spiritual dominion. He no longer puts off the day of realization, for he is alert and awake sufficiently to recognize the pressure within is seeking a natural outlet. He dams his weakest spot by diverting the dynamic surge in the direction of spirit. He begins and continues to speak, silently and orally, the highest and best words of truth he knows. In this way the great forces welling upward into expression are conserved and preserved in good words (which do not return void), instead of wasted through easy indulgence to an old habit.

The same practice could be applied successfully to any other weakness: desire for strong drink, melancholy, grief, jealousy, passion, bodily ailments, and even material need. During the very darkest and lowest hour in the conscious experience, when the feelings coordinate all too willing with negation is the time to magnify the Lord. As the devotee tells of his excellent greatness, his loving-kindness and tender mercies, while glancing Godward with his heart in his eyes, as it were, he is apt to lose himself so completely through his devotion that he forgets even to speak praises to the Most High. He waits enraptured in his Presence and, when he again comes to himself, he remembers the touch of the Divine. He speaks, looks, and acts as a different

person. He comes back from that communication, as Emerson says, with a changed tone.

What we visualize, what we deny and affirm, is important, for all thought formulates according to the image molding it. However, what we look toward influences our thinking, and, rather than deal with the secondary, we choose to deal with the primary.

So, whenever you are in your journey toward the heights, take stock of your motives and your practices, for they are important to you in that you yourself become the fulfillment of them. If they are centered in God, whether through the practice of visualization, denial and affirmation, or the uplook, you are safe from all harm, for you will be led of the Spirit and, in a comparatively short while, you will stand consciously in the Presence of your Lord. Thenceforth God will be Omnipresent to you wherever you go and in whatever you do.

RECAPITULATION

The practice of visualization tends to tempt the person to demonstrate more and better things for outer success. The effects are temporary.

Denial and affirmation tend to lead toward self-change. An effort is made to purify the thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes as one awakens to the fact that the outer world will change to conform to a perfected inner consciousness.

Uplook leads the attention of the mind altogether away from the outer world and self and devotes it to God. As we come to know God more fully, we make less effort to demonstrate and, lo, all things are added unto us!

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THE FLESH PROFITETH NOTHING

By A. J. Truesdell

Perhaps the most difficult realization for man to make is that he is not a material being. He has allowed himself to become attached to material things so securely that he appears joined unto them. For ages he has thought of himself as a body of flesh, bone, nerves, and blood, a structure which proves so impermanent that he seems to lose conscious hold upon it from time to time.

Until a man catches at least a glimpse of his true nature, he identifies himself with this purely physical state and all else is foolishness unto him. The development of a healthy physique is his main aim in life. However, many persons are coming to realize this is not the highest attainment for anyone. It is good to have a beautiful, healthy body; but the race has demonstrated again and again that the perfected physical body is not immortal; that the immortality it seeks is more than the mere continuance of man's existence as a purely physical specimen.

We, who have come far enough along the path to give assent to comments like this, know that the flesh is not our life. The flesh is but a medium, as

it were, to be used to manifest the presence of a magical idea which transcends it. Often the flesh body appears to be full of blemish. So long as we behold form as real, that long shall we see imperfection, and imperfection will be in us. We shall come to see the Eternal only after our vision is cleansed of and casts off all form.

"Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, ... they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Not only have we viewed our body separate from soul and Spirit, but we have beheld within the body a multitude of organs and functions, each separate and distinct. So long as we observe separateness and multiplicity, we shall be troubled and we shall miss the opportunity of seeing ourselves whole, or one.

We watch over the body and again and again it slips from our grasp. We seem to learn nothing from experience. We continue to make the same mistakes in judgment as we repeat the process of bringing forth body after body to house our consciousness.

We are so vigilant over the little corporeal body that wriggles and stretches as it grows, and the little intellect that thinks and thinks, that we neglect to give attention to the Spirit that aspires.

"Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord."

"The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

The flesh, which has become an idol filled with our own voice, will not keep silent so long as we believe it is the most important part of our equipment. It is but a means to an end and will resolve itself in right relation only when a better vision of Being is established. Man is capable of adjusting himself to any condition. If he chooses to live in the flesh exclusively, he meets the demands of the flesh and for a season all goes well. Eventually, however, all flesh reaches its maximum of growth and development and comes to an expected end. Its frailty finally reveals itself and the consciousness is suddenly unclothed, without a body.

The body is a hard taskmaster. It tells us how it feels and what it wants but it never reveals how we ought to care for it. It demands pampering and exercise, but of itself does not use good judgment. Whenever a man outgrows the purely fleshly pleasures, he may go on to learn of and find expression in higher regions of consciousness.

Watch not the body, its actions and re-actions. Watch for the coming of the Son of man into consciousness. "I that speak unto thee, am he."

"Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

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PLOTINUS AS A SPIRITUAL GUIDE

By R. A. Applegate, Jr.

Chapter II - Purgation

Purgation has been admitted by the mystics of all ages to be the first step in the upward path towards enlightenment. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." It is essentially a metanoia, a repentance, a turning from one set of values to another. It is the declaring of the uselessness of those things which the "natural man" gives his life to attaining. It has an outer phase and an inner phase. The former is the reformation of conduct; the latter is the repudiation of certain mental states or states of consciousness. One of the best descriptions has, I think, been given by Gerald Heard: "It becomes even easier to understand this first term of training, of the conscious evolution of consciousness, if we put into our contemporary language, into the language of evolution, these three categories which the mystics map and list (Purgation or Catharsis, Liberation and Enlightenment, and Union or Completion). What in a phrase are the saints and mystics aiming at? They see that man as he is is at best only half made, at worst a grave mistake. Therefore they are aiming at transcending the ego by emerging into so high a form of consciousness that the ego becomes simply a limitation, a suffocating restriction. If that is their aim (and there can be no doubt that it is) then it is clear why we have to start our training with Purgation. Somehow the current of our evolution has become sidetracked from its onward flow and turned into a stagnant backwater. We must drain ourselves out of this ditch and rejoin the main stream of life. We are arrested growths. Purgation is then simply the reduction of the ego. Once that swelling is reduced, the individual consciousness becomes free to develop. It becomes proficient: it can do what it wishes. With that, its outlook opens up. It becomes enlightened. It is inevitable that after this it should seek the full consciousness which the saints and mystics call the Unitive state, the return to Eternal Life."

Purgation is a comprehensive discipline which aim is at the prohibition or restraining of certain destructive actions, mental states, and emotions. It is the turning away from all that would hinder the attainment of the ultimate goal of the mystic philosopher. It has three phases corresponding to the three stages of advancement. These three stages are: first, that at which the conduct is constant and purposeful, although it may cost great effort; second, that at which the character is likewise pure, so that the philosopher no longer even desires that which would hinder the ultimate attainment, although he may be often filled with sadness, because he is still conscious of the presence of evil in the world; and, third, that at which the philosopher is no longer conscious of evil as having any reality. The three phases of purgation corresponding to these three stages are the reformation of conduct, the reformation of character, and the purgation of consciousness itself.

Plotinus places a great amount of emphasis on purgation. He says specifically that it is the first step towards unification. "There are two stages of the path. the first degree is the conversion from the lower life." Purgation, for Plotinus, is not mortification. The body is not to be despised but to be made a willing and useful servant rather than a master. The emotions, appetites, and in the advanced stages, the intellect are to be stilled; and the

philosopher is to flee multiplicity that he may dedicate himself to his high science.

Of the purely external phase of purgation, Plotinus has little to say. He does not, as Plato does for the guardians of the ideal state, describe a strict regimen which includes communal living and the possession of everything in common. For him, it is always the inner disposition which determines the external actions; and, correspondingly, it is upon the inner phases of purgation that he places the most emphasis. However, partly from the *Enneads* and partly from Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, we can arrive at some conclusions concerning Plotinus' views of the necessary external disciplines.

This external phase of purgation can be divided into three categories or three disciplines, which, as Gerald Heard has pointed out, aim at combating, "The three ties which the ego weaves around the growing soul. Those three ties are; the addictions of appetite; the possessiveness of 'means,' money, of 'goods;' and the pretentiousness of fame and reputation." These disciplines are represented by the classic triple vow of chastity, poverty, and obedience, which has been given the modern rendering of: "The promise to aim at the three-fold freedom of Anonymity, that refusal to put oneself forward. Frugality, that refusal of more than efficient subsistence, and Dedication of the mind-body, that athleticism which refuses to be indulgent or distracted."

Of the discipline of "anonymity," Plotinus has little to say. He does not, as Plato does in *Republic*, 496, inveigh against the evil effects of political activity. He does say, however, that spiritual progress can be made more easily by a person who is not actively engaged in the world of affairs than by one who is. "Men quite outside the active life may attain the state of felicity, and not in a less, but in a greater degree than men of affairs." Here, moreover, we may refer to the insistence of the senator, Rogantius, who was so influenced by Plotinus' teaching that he gave up his senatorial rank and refused his appointment as praetor, although the lictors were at his door waiting to conduct him to the forum. He was praised by Plotinus and was held up as a model of the philosophic way of life. Thus it would seem that Plotinus did advise against the holding of public office as a deterrent to the higher life, although, as a close friend of the emperor, Gallienus, it would not have been wise for him to say so in writing. It is true that at one time Plotinus formed the idea of founding the model city, Platonopolis, but that was to have been a place of refuge and study for philosophers, and would doubtless have been more on the lines of a school, with some sort of arrangements for communal living, than of a political organization. Indeed the discipline which Plotinus advocates, the complete withdrawal from the system of the senses that one may dedicate himself to the vision of the good, would automatically exclude political, or even business aspirations, no matter how idealistic the motive.

(to be continued next month)

Alphabet of
DAILY MEDITATIONS
For Every Week Day of the Month

January 1947

1. I have set the Lord ALWAYS before me.
2. The BEAUTY of the Lord our God BE upon us.
3. My heart CRIETH out for the living God.
4. Thou has DONE wonderful things.
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6. My EXPECTATION is from Him.
7. Hold FAST the FAITHFUL word.
8. The earth is full of the GOODNESS of the Lord.
9. HOPE thou in God.
10. Thou upholdest me IN mine INTEGRITY.
11. Take nothing for your JOURNEY.
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13. KNOW ... that the Lord He is God in heaven.
14. He satisfieth the LONGING soul.
15. He is God that ... MAKETH MY way perfect.
16. Blessed be His glorious NAME forever.
17. I also OVERCAME.
18. The Lord is my PORTION, saith my soul.
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20. QUICKEN us, and we will call upon Thy Name.
21. God is a REFUGE for us.
22. Pray to thy Father which is in SECRET.
23. TRUST in Him at all times.
24. UNDO the heavy burdens, and ... go free.
25. I am the VINE, ye are the branches.
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27. Thy WILL be done.
28. YE have consecrated YOURSELVES.
29. Where is thy ZEAL and thy strength?
30. Blessed are the merciful.
31. With God nothing shall be impossible.

Constructive words are building factors in consciousness. We invite you to keep the DAILY MEDITATIONS with us.